



United States Mission to the OSCE

Closing Statement

As prepared for delivery by Head of Delegation Lorne Craner
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, September 30, 2005

Mr. Moderator,

This meeting has provided us with a unique opportunity to examine the broad range of our human dimension commitments. We have discussed difficult problems here, as we ought. While my delegation has cited numerous specific problem areas, we do so as part of a broader engagement with virtually each government concerned and more often than not with the support of bilateral and OSCE programs aimed at finding solutions to these issues. We are ever mindful of the *human* dimension of our work – the fact that issues on our agenda impact the everyday lives of actual people - from the aspiring opposition leader to the budding journalist.

Our agenda has been full, and at times cramped. We regret that time allocated to some topics was insufficient to accommodate all of those desiring to speak. The United States appreciates the contributions of the some 250 NGOs who participated in this meeting. We also benefited from the rich program of side-events. These past two weeks have been time well spent.

The valuable partnership between participating States and civil society has been an essential aspect of the Helsinki process from the beginning. While great strides have been made in advancing the core principles of the Final Act over the years, our discussions here have highlighted the unfinished nature of the work begun in Helsinki.

Mr. Moderator, the success of our meeting will ultimately be determined by the degree to which the concerns expressed here enhance respect for the fundamental freedoms and human rights in keeping with our OSCE commitments. We are heartened by the dynamic changes underway in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan as their people boldly break with the past in search of a brighter future. Upcoming elections in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan offer opportunities for those governments to demonstrate their commitment to democracy. Regrettably, democratic aspirations are routinely suppressed in Belarus, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

The overall situation in Uzbekistan remains bleak in the aftermath of the May 13 tragic events in Andijon, with new concerns arising about the conduct of the related trials that began last week. We are alarmed by the apparent general crackdown on human rights activists and journalists in Uzbekistan; their work now is more important than ever. The international community's response to this crisis has not been strong enough. We again call on the Government of Uzbekistan to allow an independent international investigation of the

events, and to ensure that international observers have access to trials of those arrested in connection with the Andijon events. We have taken note of the many calls for the use of the Moscow Mechanism to trigger such an investigation. We also note with regret that Uzbekistan did not participate in any of the formal sessions of this meeting.

We welcome the participation of Turkmenistan for the first time in years and hope that this signals an increased willingness to engage on Human Dimension issues. We remain concerned by widespread human rights violations in that country. We would like to stress again the critical importance of allowing the ICRC to visit prisons and we urge the Government of Turkmenistan to provide the ICRC access to all its prisoners without further delay or restrictions and to immediately provide information on and access to those arrested in connection with the events of November 2002, including our former OSCE colleague, Batyr Berdiev. It is cruel and callous that the family members of these individuals, as well as our own Embassies, have not even been able to confirm whether these individuals are dead or alive.

We are also very troubled by the continued authoritarian situation in Belarus, a country that President Bush has called “the last outpost of tyranny in Europe.” As we have said in our statements and heard from others, the Government of Belarus has enacted legislation amounting to a restriction of the activities of NGOs, independent media, political parties, trade unions, and religious groups. Attempts to stifle the besieged independent media in Belarus have only intensified, with suspensions of newspapers, crippling fines, and specious libel suits to muzzle dissenting voices. Recent government actions against the embattled New Life Church in Minsk, including police raids and draconian fines, also are troubling and violate OSCE religious freedom commitments.

Our concerns over specific developments and trends in the Russian Federation are well known and we urge that country to join the ranks of those committed to advancing democracy, human rights and the rule of law at home and beyond. We again urge the Russian Federation to fulfill its OSCE commitments and remain concerned about the freedom of the media, NGOs, political parties, and national and religious minorities, as well as the rule of law. A move from election to nomination by the President of regional governors has further strengthened the power of the executive branch, raising questions about government accountability. While we recognize the presence of some terrorist elements in the conflict and grievous atrocities committed by separatist forces, this does not excuse abuses committed by Russian forces, a lack of meaningful accountability for such abuses, or discriminatory attitudes on the part of Russian authorities towards displaced persons from Chechnya. We again urge the Russian Federation to halt these abuses and hold their perpetrators, both military and civilian, accountable.

We are also troubled by the latest steps in a pattern of harassment against the human rights NGO, the Russian Chechen Friendship Society (RCFS). This has included criminal charges in two cases against its executive director and editor-in-chief, Stanislav Dmitrievsky, intimidating leaflets against him and other staff, and the seizure of funds and freezing of the organization’s bank account by tax police. We urge local authorities to stop the intimidation of the NGO’s members and to unfreeze its bank accounts.

Discussions these last two weeks have demonstrated the vital role that NGOs play in the promotion and assessment of our commitments in the Human Dimension here in Warsaw and in their implementation at home. We are therefore deeply concerned about what appears to be an increasing pattern of harassment and restrictions on NGOs in some countries. We support the calls of some NGOs here last week for the OSCE to increase the monitoring of the situation of NGOs and political parties and promotion of the fundamental freedoms of assembly and association in the OSCE region, possibly through a supplemental human dimension meeting devoted to this topic in 2006. None of our States can have truly democratic institutions without the unhindered participation of civil society.

We particularly would like to commend the participation last week of domestic non-partisan election observation organizations, as well as ODIHR's initiative to convene a side event to showcase their activities. We agree with the overwhelming support expressed by both NGO and State participants for existing OSCE election standards and ODIHR observation and assessment methodology. We also agree with NGO criticisms of CIS election observation. We urge the CIS to be more transparent and to publicize information on its methodology and how it recruits observers.

Assisting States in building democratic institutions is a core goal of the OSCE. We believe this would be a good focus for some of our human dimension events next year. Perhaps rather than having several disparate topics for supplementary human dimension meetings and the ODIHR seminar in 2006, we could look at various aspects of strengthening democratic institutions and lead up to a comprehensive examination at next year's HDIM. These aspects could include judicial reform and independence and combating corruption and promoting good governance.

While the OSCE maintains some of the most sophisticated commitments on freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief, we believe too many participating States are falling short of their commitments. Limitations on religious activity and speech are troubling, and we urge all participating States to redouble their efforts at compliance. On related tolerance issues, the United States supports the continued OSCE focus on anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination. These issues cannot be ignored and must steadfastly be confronted. Therefore, the United States would support holding conferences on the model of Cordoba in 2007 and 2009, with expert level meetings in the off years. We also support the reappointment of the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office. We commend ODIHR and Personal Representative Orhun for the successful meeting they organized with over 20 Muslim NGOs from throughout the OSCE region this Wednesday; recent events in the OSCE region have shown that we all must work to combat discrimination against persons who are or who are perceived to be Muslim. We also appreciate the efforts of participating States to fulfill their Sofia commitments on forwarding information to ODIHR periodically on legislation and statistics on anti-Semitic crimes and hate crimes. However, too few have responded, and we urge all to do so immediately. .

We support the OSCE's work on combating trafficking in human beings, in promoting the role of women in conflict prevention and crisis management, and in preventing violence against women. In connection with this, we believe a priority should be to ensure that our own peacekeeping troops and international mission members do not contribute to trafficking or engage in sexual exploitation or abuse. Enforcement of policies against individual perpetrators ultimately remains the responsibility of each troop-contributing country, and we urge all OSCE participating States to review the sufficiency of national laws to ensure that a basis exists to enforce policies against exploitation, abuse and trafficking. As Swedish Ambassador Lena Sundh so correctly pointed out at a side event this week, it is not only a matter of ethical behavior, but also of ensuring that these missions can successfully and effectively carry out their tasks. Bluntly put, we must practice what we preach.

I would like to thank the Director of ODIHR for an extremely well-run meeting this year. Once again, the numerous side events proved to be a highlight, allowing us to hear various perspectives and to talk more in depth on issues. The agenda was better-organized, and we believe it was an improvement to intersperse the regular sessions with the special topic days, as well as to schedule related topics near one another. We would like to see more preparation and thought given to the agendas for the human dimension projects day, as well as the special topic days. The number of delegations and NGOs that prepared interventions for the session on national minorities and Roma demonstrated the high level of interest in these topics, and we strongly recommend more time be scheduled next year for discussion of these important issues. Side events on Romani-related issues helped identify many areas where OSCE engagement can be constructive in the coming year.

This is crucial work, in this, the 30th anniversary year of the Helsinki Final Act. As President Ford said at the signing of that Act, "History will judge ...us... not by the promises we make, but by the promises we keep." As it was 30 years ago, so it is today: we, the participating States of the OSCE, will be judged not by the promises we make but by the promises we keep.